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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NIGER DELTA CHRISTIAN YOUTH MOVEMENT  
TELLS JTF DON'T KILL MILITANTS, TRY THEM AS CRIMINALS

Classified By: Consul General Donna M. Blair, Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

1.(C) Summary: On October 24, Rex Anighoro, President of the Niger Delta Christian Youth Movement (NDCYM), told PolOffs the only way out of the Niger Delta problem is to involve credible religious leaders. NDCYM is providing safe houses for militant youths who want to renounce violence, and is seeking ways to provide training and employment for them. Anighoro urges the military Joint Task Force (JTF) to treat militants as criminals, arresting and bringing them to trial, rather than killing them and/or attacking villages suspected of harboring them. End Summary.

12. (SBU) Rex Anighoro, President of the Niger Delta Christian Youth Movement (NDCYM) told PolOffs on October 24 that the so-called militancy in the Niger Delta had become criminalized on two levels. On the one hand, the leaders of the various militant camps have turned into businessmen with networks of firms engaged in a wide-range of businesses and controlling investments around Nigeria and abroad, he alleged. On the other hand, the foot-soldiers from the camps increasingly engage in kidnappings and illegal bunkering on their own account and purely for profit. Anighoro alleged that the leaders of the so-called militants extorted contracts from local and state governments by threatening to increase the level of violence if their preferred contractors did not get the business.

13. (C) Anighoro remarked that the governors were not willing to meet with the NDCYM but regularly did business with the criminals calling themselves militants. He noted that the ties between local governments and the militants are often very close. For example, the Chairman of Warri South West Local Government Area in Delta State is George Ekpompolo, the younger brother of the leader of one of the largest militant camps, "Tom Polo." Furthermore, he maintained the pervasive policy of "settling" the militants means not only that the militants return to violence as soon as the payments stop, but creates so many intermediaries who profit from the system that local elites have little interest in altering the status quo. According to Anighoro among those profiting from the status quo are many commanders in the JTF, who are involved in and/or profit from illegal bunkering activities.

14. (U) The NDCYM believes the only way out of this vicious cycle is to get credible religious leaders involved. Anighoro pointed to the example of Dr. Martin Luther King. Religious leaders, Anighoro believes, can advocate an end to the violence and turn criminal militancy back into intellectual militancy. The rights of the people of the Niger Delta need to be fought for, Anighoro argued, but by legal means. Meanwhile, NDCYM is working to provide safe houses for militant youths who want to renounce violence, and to provide on a small scale training and employment for them.

15. (SBU) Anighoro alleged that the JTF is composed primarily of Muslim soldiers from the North of Nigeria. (Note: We have heard from other sources that the JTF is reluctant to deploy military personnel from the Niger Delta to their home states. End Note.) He claims that this fuels the perception among youth in the Niger Delta that the JTF is an instrument of northern oppression. The image of the JTF is further tarnished by the fact that it often uses "excessive force" against the population. Anighoro argued that the militants are criminals and criminals should be arrested not killed outright. The JTF, however, does not come to arrest suspected militants and turn them over to a court of law, but rather attacks entire camps and or communities suspected of harboring militants.

16. (C) Comment: NDCYM appears to be a small organization founded by Anighoro, who was trained as a lawyer but has worked as a Gospel singer. Anighoro seems passionate about helping the youth of the Niger Delta find a way out of the

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current dead-end situation, but does not appear to have great influence. Nevertheless, the points he makes about the complicity of the JTF in criminal bunkering, their brutality against communities and their mandate to kill, rather than arrest and try militants, lends support to the call of Niger Delta leaders, who want the JTF withdrawn from the Delta.

17. (U) This cable was cleared by Abuja.  
BLAIR